



## News Release

### For Immediate Release:

Monday, May 2, 2011

### Media Contact:

Jenny Johnson

Violence & Injury Prevention Program

(o) 801-538-9416 (m) 801-298-1569

Janet Brooks

Primary Children's Medical Center

(o) 801-662-6585 (m) 801-597-8070

## Never Leave a Child Alone in a Car

*Health Officials Urge Caution as Temperatures Rise*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Summer can be a deadly time of year for children. With warmer temperatures on the way, health experts are pleading with parents to be especially careful with their children in and around cars.

Despite repeated warnings, from 1998 to 2010, an average of 38 children died each year in the U.S. from heatstroke after being left unattended in vehicles. More than half (51%) of the deaths occurred when the child was “forgotten” by a caregiver, another 30% after a child was playing in a vehicle and became trapped inside, and 17% of the children were intentionally left in a vehicle by an adult.

“Keep your children safe by not leaving them alone in or around a car,” said Christi Fisher, Director of Safe Kids Utah. “Remember, kids alone in cars are kids in danger. And in Utah, it’s against the law.”

Utah is one of 19 states with laws addressing unattended children in cars. Senate Bill 124 makes it a class C misdemeanor to “intentionally, recklessly, knowingly, or with criminal negligence leave a child under nine years of age in an enclosed compartment of a motor vehicle.”

“The Utah sun can quickly turn a car into a deadly oven, even on a cool day. On a 78 degree day, temperatures inside a car can climb to 100 degrees in just three minutes. After six to eight minutes, the temperature can reach over 125 degrees,” said Fisher.

- MORE -

Health officials also urge drivers to use extra caution when children are around vehicles. In Utah, an average of four children under the age of 10 are killed and another 60 are injured each year after being hit or run over in driveways, parking lots, and other private property locations.

“Many of these deaths could have been prevented if drivers had been more careful,” said Janet Brooks, Child Advocacy Manager at Primary Children’s Medical Center. “Just walking around the vehicle before pulling out or backing up to make sure no one is behind or in front of the vehicle may save a child’s life.”

Follow these tips to protect your little ones this summer:

- **Never leave a child alone in a car, even with the windows down.** Leaving a window slightly open has no effect on the temperature in the vehicle. To view a reenactment of a car heating up, go to [www.ggweather.com/heat/index.htm](http://www.ggweather.com/heat/index.htm).
- **Dial 911 immediately if you see an unattended child in a car.**
- **Create reminders.** Place a cell phone, purse, gym bag or something that is needed at your next stop on the floor in front of a child in a backseat. This will help you see your child when you open the door and reach for your belongings.
- **Lock all car doors and trunks** – even at home or in the garage.
- **Teach children to not play in or around cars.**
- **Check vehicles and trunks first if a child is missing.**
- **Establish a plan with your child care provider** that if your child fails to arrive within an agreed upon time, he or she will call you right away. Be especially mindful of your child if you change your routine for child care.
- **Watch children closely**, especially when loading and unloading the vehicle.
- **Always secure children properly in child safety seats or booster seats in the back seat.**
- **Always check completely around any vehicle before pulling or backing out.**

Parents and caregivers are invited to attend free car seat checks and safety fairs being held by Safe Kids Coalitions and local health departments across the state during May. To find an event near you or to learn more about keeping your child safe in and around cars, visit [www.safekidsutah.org](http://www.safekidsutah.org).

###

*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*